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Montessori – an education for the future

2007 was the centenary of the international Montessori movement. In New Zealand Montessori educators shared their views of why Montessori is the education for the future.

Montessori – a source of sanity and balance...

Montessori education in New Zealand will emerge as a source of sanity and balance at a time when our state education system is fast becoming product orientated and market driven, reflecting a machine and screen world where digital technology reigns. Our Montessori schools are places where time slows down and strong connections to people and places protected and celebrated. Digital technology will be just one of the many resources we will use. The content of our lessons will promote mindful responses to human questions and enable children to make wise and creative choices about real life lived in community.

Our Montessori communities will be guided by clear simple human values that empower our children to become strong individuals who embrace diversity and

who interact with each other and the environment with respect and responsibility. The future of our planet needs children who garden, who dream, whose lives and learning are connected to our human reality. In a time of distraction and excess, Montessori education will provide us a way back to what is essential and sufficient.

Pauline Harter, Wairarapa Montessori Centre and Montessori at Southend School, New Zealand

Montessori is not about buildings or pieces of man-made materials, it's about assisting the development of the human spirit...

Maria Montessori had always hoped the Montessori system would become a 'state' educational system. However, each time the wheels began to turn, something happened. In the United States, she went head to head with John Dewey and his school of philosophy (the progressives); in Spain, Franco came to power; in Holland, Hitler invaded; in Italy, Mussolini burned equipment and materials. Perhaps, as Montessorians look for state funding in the future, they will remember these lessons and consider that Montessori is not about buildings or pieces of man-made materials, it's about the assisting the development of the human spirit. Anne Frank proved that.

Mary Russo, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Montessorians have a gem in their understanding of this simple yet profound philosophy of education...

Increasingly I hear comments of dismay from parents either at the laissez faire approach to education or to the rigidity of adult led programmes. Neither do much to nurture children's innate potential. Montessorians have a gem in their understanding of this simple yet profound philosophy of education or – as I see it now – as a unique approach to human development. But like many precious

gems, they are rare! Therefore, I see two things for the Montessori movement to focus on for the future. We need many more Montessori prepared environments for babies through to adolescents and to fulfill that need we must have many more adults with a coherent understanding of Montessori principles to create those environments. Let us actively recruit by introducing the philosophy that underpins the Montessori method to parents, to students, to colleges of education and to those who genuinely believe that children deserve more than is currently being served!

Carol Potts, Auckland, New Zealand

My dream for Montessori in New Zealand is that it will be a well-respected and understood educational system...

My dream for Montessori in New Zealand, is that it will be a well-respected and understood educational system, where many students, especially young men were undertaking their training in venues throughout the country. Where there was a choice of education for our children all the way through to their college years.

How can we get there? Spread the word, encourage early childhood and primary teachers to come into our centres, with a view to sharing ideas. Montessori has so much to offer, especially to the children who are struggling and falling behind. Face to face training of a very high standard needs to become available here in New Zealand, and lets all encourage the young men to come back into teaching roles, where they have so much to offer.

Tia Wooller, Totara Hill Montessori, Matakana, North Auckland, New Zealand

Science now conclusively proves Montessori's developmental theory and the accuracy of Montessori educational practices to the ways people learn...

New Zealand Montessori will continue to grow in size due to demand, and as it grows, so will its influence in the way education is practiced throughout the rest of this country's education sector. We have won the theoretical argument. Science now conclusively proves Montessori's developmental theory and the accuracy of Montessori educational practices to the ways people learn. The newly released draft New Zealand curriculum, with its focus on producing "confident, connected, actively involved lifelong learners" and promoting self-managed, critical thinkers, is now unwittingly, I believe, more suited to Montessori classes than classes in current state schools. I believe the next decade will see us influence the way education is practiced. The state sector is likely to see the wide-spread end of school day 'periods', of whole-class learning and see more involvement of students in their own assessment and planning of their learning. Short of formal adoption of the Montessori 'method', it is doubtful that the state sector or anyone in it will manage to fully implement our concepts and practices. Therefore, our growth and strength will depend on Montessori schools maintaining their authenticity to remain relevant and exceptional in their study and application of the Montessori approach, and be there for others to follow.

Sola Freeman, Montessori parent, Wellington, New Zealand

The future of Montessori is in their hands...

The Montessori community has a responsibility, based on the core of Montessori principles, to continue to provide environments that allow children to use their hands. When a child asks "Can I see that?" of an object, they want to hold it and make contact with it. The entire environment is tactile. It is made that way because we know how important it is for children to learn multi-sensorially. In providing a solid foundation for children to learn this way we acknowledge the tenants that Maria Montessori observed 100 years ago. Humans have not changed their learning patterns just because societies and technology have changed. While technology can facilitate learning, it does not change the nature of learning. Do you grasp this? This is the gist of understanding Montessori.

Maree Orland, Casa dei Bambini Montessori Foundation School, Christchurch, New Zealand

The role of Montessori education is to raise peaceful, self-motivated, capable students who will provide strong leadership...

The role of Montessori education is to raise peaceful, self-motivated, capable students who will provide strong leadership wherever they may be. These future leaders can then influence decision-making at many different levels throughout our community and thus bring about a positive influence within society.

The role of the Montessori movement in New Zealand is to be seen as a viable educational option for all New Zealand children, not just those who can afford it. It should also support raising leaders of influence who embrace peacefulness as achievable throughout the world.

Rose Phillips, Eastern Suburbs Montessori Primary School, Auckland, New Zealand

It is time to help others see what we all know to be true, that children of all ages, stages and abilities flourish under this system of education...

Montessori has spent the last many years in New Zealand getting a toe hold in both the early childhood and primary sector. At times it has seemed precarious, and there are cases when it still seems we are fighting to be heard and recognised, but I think we are accepted now by the officials as something that is not going to go away. Now we are this far, it is time to help others see what we all know to be true – that children of all ages, stages and abilities flourish under this system of education. In our multicultural society where some children are failing and others are opting out of education far too early, and where people are looking for an answer to these and other issues relating to education and

children, we need to let them know that the answer is here and, great results are more than possible, that we do not need to keep reinventing the wheel.

Jan Gaffney, Principal, Wā Ora Montessori School, New Zealand

The power of what we can achieve is staggering...

I think Montessori education (in NZ in particular) is at a turning point. It is starting to grow and expand into the other age-groups but it is still very vulnerable. How we move forward now will have a huge impact on the strength and acceptance of Montessori as a possible alternative to traditional education methods.

There is now research validating Montessori education as a viable alternative. We have a number of challenges however facing us that may and have already led to the watering down of Montessori in its truest sense. Some changes are necessary and good. We must constantly be willing to listen and learn from new developments and research in science and technology. We must, however, fight against compromising what we know is not in the best interests of the children and in how Montessori is delivered.

The power of what we can achieve is staggering. Right now, there is a small proportion of this generation, across the globe who have grown up in a society that encouraged them to think for themselves, consider others and to find their role in the cosmos. These children are our potential leaders of tomorrow.

Gillian Somers Principal, New Plymouth Montessori School, New Plymouth, New Zealand

The way forward seems clear, Montessori's role in the future is to be heard as Children's Advocates...

Within Montessori education, we have at our fingertips, the sensitive language to describe the stages children pass through as they grow. Montessori theory and

practice are frequently validated by researchers studying child development and learning. Whether the latest buzz words are multiple intelligence's, learning styles, flow theory, or right brain/left brain thinking, the Montessori model is a close and compatible fit.

As Montessori educators, we are well equipped to speak loud and clear on any child-related subject; not just in our schools, or to our parent community, but also in the wider public arena. As a profession that serves children, we need to be heard more often. Did we misplace the Montessori submission in the recent debate about "smacking"? Who heard our perspective on the amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act? When our politicians proposed that the age for "criminal responsibility" be lowered to make 10 year olds accountable, we missed an opportunity to demonstrate outrage, to share wisdom, and to caution law-makers by declaring: "Slow down...because we know about this stuff, 10 is coming up to 12, these are poignant ages...please listen!"

The way forward seems clear, Montessori's role in the future is to be heard as a Children's Advocate.

Tania Gaffney, Richard Goodyear at Wā Ora Montessori School, Wellington, New Zealand and Dimitra Pantazis, Montessori at Berhampore School, Wellington, New Zealand

Our enthusiasm for Montessori must be inspirational and contagious, and bring changes to parenting, teacher-training, and community responsibility.

From those early beginnings in the slums of Rome, Montessori education has spread throughout the world. Montessori herself said, though, that she did not invent a method of education – "I studied the child, and I have taken what the child has given me"

Herein lies the future ... to go back to the roots, and scientifically examine the

needs of children. Adults can only transform children's lives and educate for a New World when Montessori's philosophy is fully understood, and its principles and practices demonstrated in our love and respect for children through application of this knowledge, and our own conduct. Our enthusiasm for Montessori must be inspirational and contagious, and bring changes to parenting, teacher-training, and community responsibility.

"Our care of the child should be governed, not by the desire 'to make him learn things', but by the endeavour always to keep burning within him that light which is called intelligence. If to this end we must consecrate ourselves it will be a work worthy of so great a result." [Advanced Montessori Method, 1917]

Beth Alcorn, Montessori World Educational Institute, Australia

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"These very children reveal to us the most vital need of their development, saying : 'Help me to do it alone!'"

— Maria Montessori, From Childhood to Adolescence

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